

YOUR VIRTUAL DISCOVERY VISIT – 63 TO THE HERITAGE STORIES OF ROTTNEST ISLAND



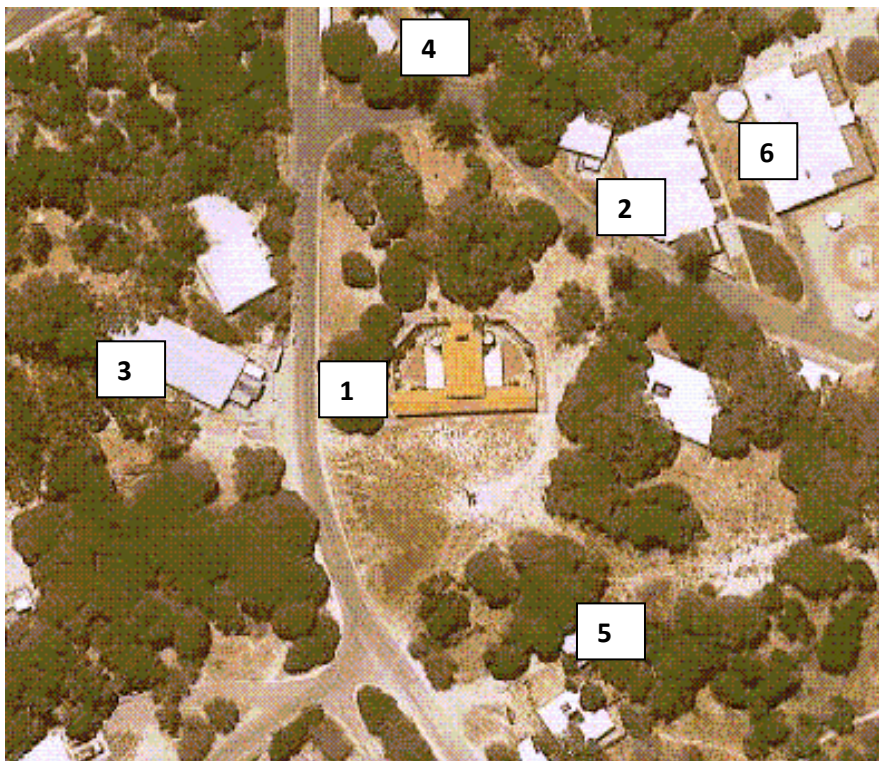
The Virtual Visit series was initiated during the COVID-19 pandemic when Rottneest Island was closed to the public due to social distancing restrictions and periods of use for quarantine from March to June 2020.

Now that the Island is again open to visitors, these Virtual Visits are continuing in 2021 to enable a further enjoyment of stories introduced at the Wadjemup Museum, the Chapman Archives or sites around the Island.

Enjoy, reflect and share.

HOLY TRINITY CHURCH

Virtual Visits 22 and 23 traced the history and use of the building now consecrated as the Rottneest Chapel. They trace the varied functions of the building from school to storehouse until its restoration and rededication as the Chapel of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary on 1 July 2000. On the other hand, Holy Trinity Church which celebrated its 46th anniversary on 31 May 2021 has served only one function. The journey to this event however was long and as varied as that of the Rottneest Chapel. This Virtual Visit explores the story of Catholic Chaplaincy on Rottneest Island.



- 1 – Holy Trinity Church
- 2 – RVGA Hub
- 3 - Picture Theatre
- 4 – Main Bus Stop
- 5 – Priory (Archives)
- 6 – Dome Café

Holy Trinity Church sits on a prominent hill, central to and overlooking many locations of interest to RVGA Guides.

Holy Trinity Church can just be seen from the Picture Theatre which was the site of many services before the Church was built. Indeed it was in the Picture Theatre on Easter Sunday in 1969, where it was formally suggested that a Catholic Church be built on Rottneest and that all collections from that date be held as a 'building fund.

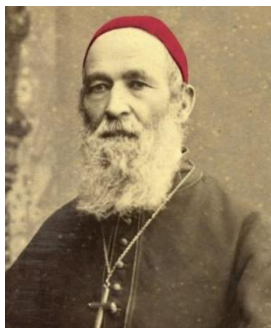
The Beginnings



It is not recorded if a Mass was celebrated on Rottnest when the French ship *Naturaliste* under Captain Hamelin was anchored off Rottnest in August 1801.

It is known for certain that no Chaplain has featured in the (in)famous French Duelist legend traditionally presented during Holiday Guiding. The focus has ever been on dramatic swordplay and a flirtatious Angeliqne.

We also know that on 10 October 1873, the Perth Gazette reported the first wedding on Rottnest between Peter Anthony Guger, first Commodore of the Royal Perth Yacht Club and Kathleen Jackson, daughter of Island Superintendant, Captain William Jackson. The ceremony was the first recorded celebration of Holy Mass on Rottnest although there may have been earlier occasions. Governor Frederick Weld, the first Catholic Governor (1869 – 1875) may have had a local priest celebrate Mass for his family while in residence on the Island. It is also recorded that Bishop Rosendo Salvado of New Norcia ministered to Aboriginal prisoners on Rottnest between 1863 and 1873.



The wedding was of considerable note. The Perth Gazette reported that, “The marriage ceremony was preformed by **Bishop Martin Griver** (Left) assisted by Red F Matheu. A pretty little chapel was improvised for the occasion in the spacious drawing room of the gubernatorial maritime residence [now Hotel Rottnest] which was gaily and appropriately decorated with olive branches and flowers. The evening before the wedding the Island was *en fete*, and among the diversions, there was a pyrothechnic display which we are assured would have created a sensation even in the metropolis”.

In research collated by Msgr John O’Shea, there are references to pastoral visits and celebrations of Mass between 1875 and 1945. Some worthy of note include: the visit of His Eminence Cardinal Patrick Moran, Archbishop of Sydney to Governor Broome on Rottnest; the celebration of Mass by Father Martelli in the home of Henri Courderot in February 1899; Sunday Mass by Oblate Fathers for Governor Strickland in 1910; and the first recorded flight of a priest to the Island undertaken by Father Kenny in 1935.

The records of pastoral care provided by the Catholic and Anglican chaplains for prisoners and prison staff and families on Rottnest are incomplete. So too are records regarding services for Catholic internees and prisoners of war awaiting repatriation during World War 1 and following World War 2 which are also sparse or not yet identified. We do know that there was a Salvation Army Chaplain who provided services on the Island in 1914-15 but the event formerly featured during Holiday Guiding [The Salvation Army Major] is less well documented.



The central story of Holy Trinity Church must focus on Monsignor Sean (John) O'Shea. He was ordained in Dublin in 1955 and came to Western Australia in the footsteps of his sister, a Sister of Mercy, who migrated in 1938. His work as a Chaplain on the Island began in 1961 during his time in Fremantle Parish. For over 50 years, "Mons" as he came to be known came off and on to the Island. He celebrated Mass in the early days in the Picture Theatre with its deck chairs and rustic windows. He also went to his flock, and many remember a standing room only Easter Service at Geordie in what today serves as the laudromat. Monsignor O'Shea came permanently to live on the Island in March 2002 and retired after his final Mass in June 2012. He died from a heart attack on 7 December 2012 and was buried on Rottneest a few steps from Holy Trinity Church on 18 December 2012.

The Church was designed by architect Neil Gabriels to be both frugal in cost and to harmonise with the local landscape. It was commended for both its aesthetics and value for money. It combines the skills and vision of both Neil and "Mons" in providing a practical precinct with the Church at the centre, moveable side doors and accommodation for both priest and visitor, office and sacristy which serves today as well as it did when originally constructed.



The 12 stained glass windows in the Church were blessed at the Mass to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Church. One window depicts the ministry of Bishop Salvado to the Aboriginal prisoners and another the Boys Reformatory. After the anniversary Mass, there was a special blessing at the Aboriginal Cemetery.



A bequest made possible the commissioning of a chime of 8 bells from the Whitechapel Bell Foundry in London. The bells chime an octave and weigh over one ton. Lack of a crane initially posed an installation problem. This was overcome by an airlift through the services of a helicopter from a visiting US naval vessel.

https://www.slwa.wa.gov.au/pdf/mn/mn1_500/mn0185.pdf

<https://therecord.com.au/news/local/holy-trinity-mass-centre-rotnest-island-celebrates-40-years/>

<https://thewest.com.au/entertainment/arts-reviews/tribute-to-grivers-legacy-ng-ya-127532>

<https://archives.rvga.asn.au/2000/06/01/the-post-rotto-jubilee-mass/>

RIA PATRON'S AWARD

The unexpected honour has outed me as the author and compiler of these Virtual Visits. As mentioned at the time of the award, these VVs are intended not as the end point but rather the start of a journey of research and discovery. Please enjoy.

I would like to thank successive Heritage Officers, Neil Young, David Harvey and Ian Maitland who have provided enticing covering letters for the email distribution. Thanks also to Steve Price for VV21- Ruston and Hornsby Engines and Lesley Silvester for VV37 – The Ancient Art of Flintknapping and Kath Boylen for research and suggestions.
Robert Mitchell.

A place of worship



Holy Trinity Catholic Church

During colonial times, clergy from the mainland travelled to Rottnest Island to celebrate Mass on an occasional basis. Early services, including the first Catholic wedding in 1873, were held in makeshift chapels. As the Island's popularity grew in the early 1900s, Sunday Mass became a regular feature during holidays.

Summary History

By the late 1960s, Monsignor John O'Shea, the Chaplain of Fremantle Port was made responsible for providing a year round Sunday Mass, which was held in the Picture Hall. On Easter Sunday 1969 the idea to build a Catholic Church on Rottnest was formally supported and fundraising began. Architect Neil Gabriel designed a structure to work with the character and atmosphere of Rottnest. The Holy Trinity Church was formally dedicated on Trinity Sunday, June 25, 1975.

Look for the two stained glass windows, designed by Vaughn Bisschops, commemorating the early years of Catholicism on Rottnest Island including the Boy's Reformatory and Bishop Salvado's visit to the Aboriginal prisoners.

Monsignor John O'Shea

- As a resident of over 50 years, Mgr O'Shea was an ionic Rottnest personality known for his welcoming nature and Irish charm.
- His warm hospitality, pikelets and fig jam were renowned. Mgr O'Shea is buried by special permission within the Church grounds. Today many holiday makers visit the church and its gardens to be touched by his memory.
- As a national chaplain to seafarers Mgr O'Shea travelled by road ten times around the coast of Australia, visiting seafarers in all ports.



Monsignor O'Shea, builder and inspiration of the church. Courtesy of The West Australian.



Floorplan of church and associated buildings.



<https://thewest.com.au/news/australia/rotto-cleric-rests-in-peace-ng-ya-371347>